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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8166
INFO RUEHK/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0910
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7899
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 6076
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 4412
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2055
RUEHN/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 4396
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 3491
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 8511
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 5960
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0662
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 2791
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 000499

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/22/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER PHUM MOPS CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: TENSIONS RISE FOLLOWING SEVERAL KILLINGS IN BATTICALOA

REF: COLOMBO 483

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (C) On May 22, a TMVP member named Santhan and his bodyguard were shot dead near the Divisional Secretary's office in Kattankudy (Batticaloa District), the home electorate of Pillaiyan's chief rival for the post of Chief Minister, M.L.A.M. Hisbullah. Santhan's wife successfully contested the Batticaloa Local Council elections in March on the TMVP ticket. Santhan, who had long had a reputation as a bully and thug, reportedly canvassed votes for his wife by intimidating both Tamil and Muslim civilians. According to Embassy contacts, he had earned many enemies within the Muslim community by extorting money from Muslim businesses.

¶2. (C) Shortly after Santhan and his bodyguard were killed, TMVP cadres shot at least three Muslims who were standing next to the petrol station near the border between Kattankudy and Arayampathy. Embassy contacts report that the bodies remain in the road, public transport has been shut down, and shops are closed. Muslim shop owners in Batticaloa town gathered at the police station seeking protection, and were escorted to Kattankudy, their hometown, on TMVP orders. A curfew has been imposed on Kattankudy.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: It is not clear who Santhan's assassins were, although the apparent revenge killings by the TMVP show that they hold Muslims responsible, rather than the LTTE. Hisbullah, who is also known for employing rough campaign tactics, took his oath today as one of four ministers in the new Eastern Province government under Chief Minister Pillaiyan. However, today's incidents may indicate that the Tamil/Muslim ethnic rift that has opened in the East in the wake of the dispute over the chief ministership has only been papered over by Hisbullah's agreeing to join the new administration. Embassy contacts describe the situation in Batticaloa as tense amid fears that the violence may escalate, particularly following Santhan's funeral on May 23. We will closely monitor the situation in the area and report any new developments septel.

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